

Sowing Futures: Youth Perspectives on Employment in Agriculture - *Ethiopia*



CHALLENGE
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Introduction

Agriculture has long been a backbone of Ethiopia's economy, employing a significant portion of the population and contributing to the country's food security and economic growth. However, in recent decades, the agricultural sector has faced challenges in attracting and retaining young people.

Traditionally, seen as labor-intensive and low-rewarding, agricultural jobs have often been overlooked by the youth, who are increasingly drawn to urban areas and non-agricultural occupations. This trend has raised concerns about the future sustainability and productivity of the sector, given the aging farming population.

In response to these challenges, the integration of modern technologies into agriculture has emerged as a transformative force. Technologies such as precision-farming, mobile-based agricultural advisory services, drone technology, and digital marketplaces are redefining the agricultural landscape in Ethiopia.

These innovations are not only improving productivity and efficiency but also making agri-jobs more appealing to the younger generation. By offering new opportunities for entrepreneurship, reducing physical labor associated with traditional farming, and providing access to real-time information, technology is reshaping perceptions of agriculture among Ethiopia youth. To better understand this shift from the perspective of the youth themselves, we employed a comprehensive research methodology rooted in the CFYE's youth centered approach. The data for this analysis was gathered through 4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), 20 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and 112 surveys.

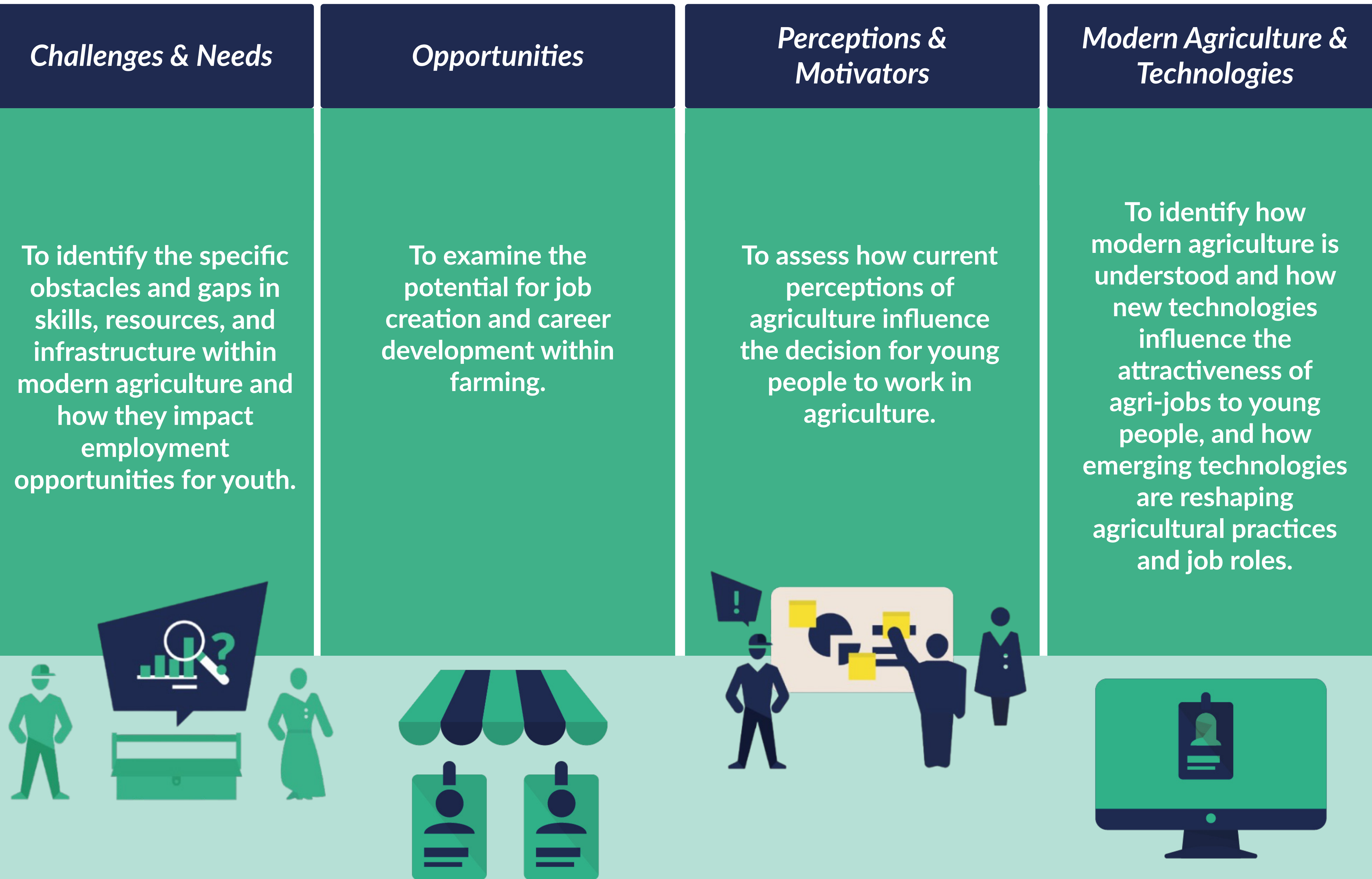


The research tools were carefully developed by four young youth experts during a three-day workshop facilitated by the CFYE. A pilot study was then conducted to refine these tools, ensuring they were well-suited to capturing the experiences and insights of young people in Ethiopia ([Youth-Centred Methodologies Video](#)).

This study aims to benefit the CFYE’s Implementing Partners (IPs) working in agriculture by providing them with a clear understanding of the youth perspective on the role of technology in agriculture. By gaining insights into how young people perceive and engage with these technological advancements, IPs will be better equipped to develop tailored strategies and tools to attract and retain young people in the agricultural sector.

Readers should consider that this study assesses the specific context of Ethiopia, particularly the beneficiaries working with the CFYE’s IPs. While the findings offer valuable insights, other variables may apply in different countries. Nevertheless, we share these learnings to provide an understanding of how Ethiopian youth perceive these changes and to demonstrate how the CFYE youth-centered approach can help others derive their own context-specific findings on the same topic. Additionally, to ensure a more comprehensive approach, CFYE will collaborate with INCLUDE to understand the business perspective of this intersection between youth employment, Agri-jobs, and new technologies.

To analyse the intersection between Agri-jobs, youth employment, and technology, we group the information into four categories:



Challenges & Needs

One of the most pressing challenges faced by these young farmers is the **shortage of capital and essential materials**. Many of them lack the financial resources needed to expand their agricultural businesses. The desire to grow is strong—especially in areas like vermicomposting, where natural compost production holds great promise. Yet, without sufficient capital to purchase additional boxes or construct durable shelters, their ambitions are often stifled. One participant expressed this frustration, stating,

"If we get these supports, we will tackle that problem and grow our business."

Access to modern agricultural tools and technology is another significant hurdle. While traditional farming methods have sustained communities for generations, they are often labor-intensive and inefficient. For instance, many young farmers still rely on oxen to plow their fields, a process that consumes both time and energy. The absence of modern equipment, like mobile tractors, limits their productivity and the overall efficiency of their agricultural activities. As one farmer said,



Beyond tools, **the lack of adequate infrastructure** exacerbates their difficulties. Poor irrigation systems, unreliable transportation, and insufficient storage facilities hamper their ability to cultivate and market their produce effectively.

During the rainy seasons, flooding becomes a recurring nightmare, washing away crops and eroding the very soil they depend on. In response, some young farmers have resorted to building terraces to combat soil erosion and constructing traditional water conservation structures, known locally as "Erken," to mitigate the impact of floods.

Moreover, **access to markets remains a significant challenge**. Despite producing high-quality crops and products, many young farmers struggle to find buyers. They often lack the necessary connections to sell their goods in lucrative markets, both locally and internationally. Without these market linkages, their efforts to generate substantial income are severely limited. A participant highlighted this need, saying,



We need support in connecting with markets, both local and international, to sell our products and increase profitability.

The struggle extends to **chemical usage and pest control** as well. Protecting crops from pests is essential for maintaining high yields, but chemicals pose risks to the environment and livestock health. Small animals, for instance, often fall victim to plants treated with pesticides. Although the youth consult with district agricultural bureaus for guidance on proper chemical use, the lack of access to safe, effective alternatives remains a persistent issue.

Adding to their burdens is the **lack of recognition and motivation** from the community and government bodies. Many young farmers feel that their contributions to agriculture go unnoticed, leaving them demoralized and questioning their efforts. One farmer poignantly expressed this sentiment:

“

It motivates us and other youths to be attracted to agricultural work if we get recognition, certificates, rewards, or other motivations from IPs.

”

The **lack of recognition and motivation** is closely linked to the social stigma of agricultural jobs. Youth stated that the communities often have a bad attitude towards agriculture, as they believe that farmers are ‘backward’ people and income generated from agriculture is low, compared to other sectors, resulting in farmers being less respected compared to other professions:

“

One of the big challenges I faced was the community stigma. When I left my job as a driver and started agriculture, my friends laughed at me, started speaking negatively and told me my decision was wrong.

”

Access to financial resources is perhaps the most critical need expressed by these young farmers. Whether they are seeking to expand their vermicomposting operations or to scale up spice production, the lack of capital is a recurring obstacle. Loans with low interest rates, grants, and starting capital are essential for them to not only maintain but also grow their businesses. One young entrepreneur emphasised,

“

We need financial support like grants, loans, or starting capital to help start and expand our agricultural work.

Another need that is expressed among the youth is the need for **skill building and training**. Youth would like to have more opportunities for training and to develop their agricultural skills and capacity to use modern technologies. Either training, mentorship or advisors could provide youth with this knowledge and practical advice. More opportunities for skill development and close guidance would also help youth to grow in the sector and address the issue of limited opportunities for career growth within the agricultural sector.

Opportunities

One of the most significant opportunities lies in the **adoption of modern agricultural practices**. The shift from traditional farming methods to more scientifically informed techniques has brought about remarkable improvements in crop yields and overall productivity. As one young farmer observed,

"Yes, there is development, especially when we produce the following scientific ways of production of various crops. I think the traditional way of farming doesn't make us successful. The production of crops using technology shows rapid change in results."

This embrace of modern practices is not just about increasing output.

Another opportunity lies in using local and natural resources to innovate and overcome material shortages. Faced with a lack of conventional construction materials and technologies, the youth have turned to indigenous solutions like using bamboo, grasses, and other locally available materials to build structures necessary for their farming activities.

This resourcefulness not only mitigates costs but also aligns with sustainable practices that are environmentally friendly and culturally resonant.

It's about ensuring that their efforts are sustainable and resilient against the challenges posed by climate change and soil degradation.

Moreover, the youth have leveraged **technology** to enhance their farming operations. Mobile phones have become indispensable tools, allowing them to access information on modern farming techniques, connect with other farmers, and even market their products. This digital revolution is helping young farmers overcome skill gaps and promote their products to a wider audience. For example, some have used YouTube tutorials and online training to improve their skills in Vermicomposting, demonstrating how technology can bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and modern innovation.

Collaboration and collective action have also proven to be powerful opportunities. By forming associations, young farmers are pooling their resources and knowledge to tackle common challenges. These associations have enabled them to make collective purchases of essential inputs like fertilizers and pesticides, and to invest in shared infrastructure such as irrigation systems and storage facilities. This cooperative approach not only reduces costs but also strengthens their bargaining power when dealing with suppliers and buyers. One participant highlighted the benefits of this collaboration, stating,



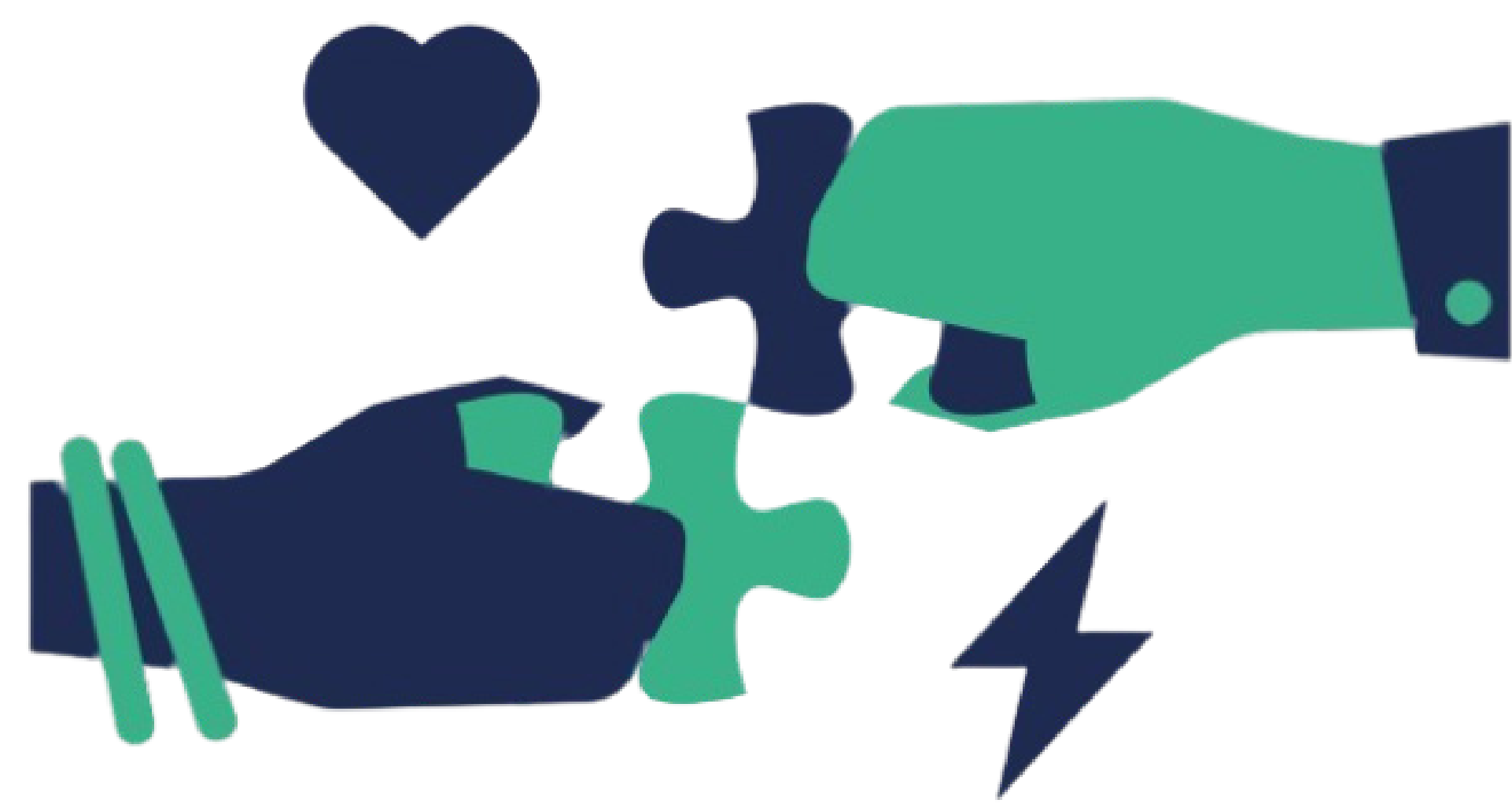
Since our involvement in the association, we are showing progress in different ways, such as generating substantial income and producing improved products.

Market opportunities are also expanding, thanks to the proactive efforts of the youth in promoting their products and seeking new avenues for sales. Some have already started exploring possibilities beyond their local markets, with ambitions to supply neighboring towns and cities. This expansion is crucial for increasing their income and ensuring the long-term viability of their agricultural enterprises. As one farmer shared,



We were able to construct a barn that can help us keep our products healthy and sell them when there is greater demand in the market. I hope we will open stores in other towns where we will be able to supply our products to markets in neighboring cities.

Furthermore, the youth have recognised the importance of **advocacy and engaging with government bodies** to secure necessary support. Through persistent efforts, they have been able to secure land, receive essential materials during crises like flooding, and access government-provided resources. This engagement has not only helped them survive challenging times but has also strengthened their position within the broader agricultural landscape of Ethiopia.



Perceptions & Motivators

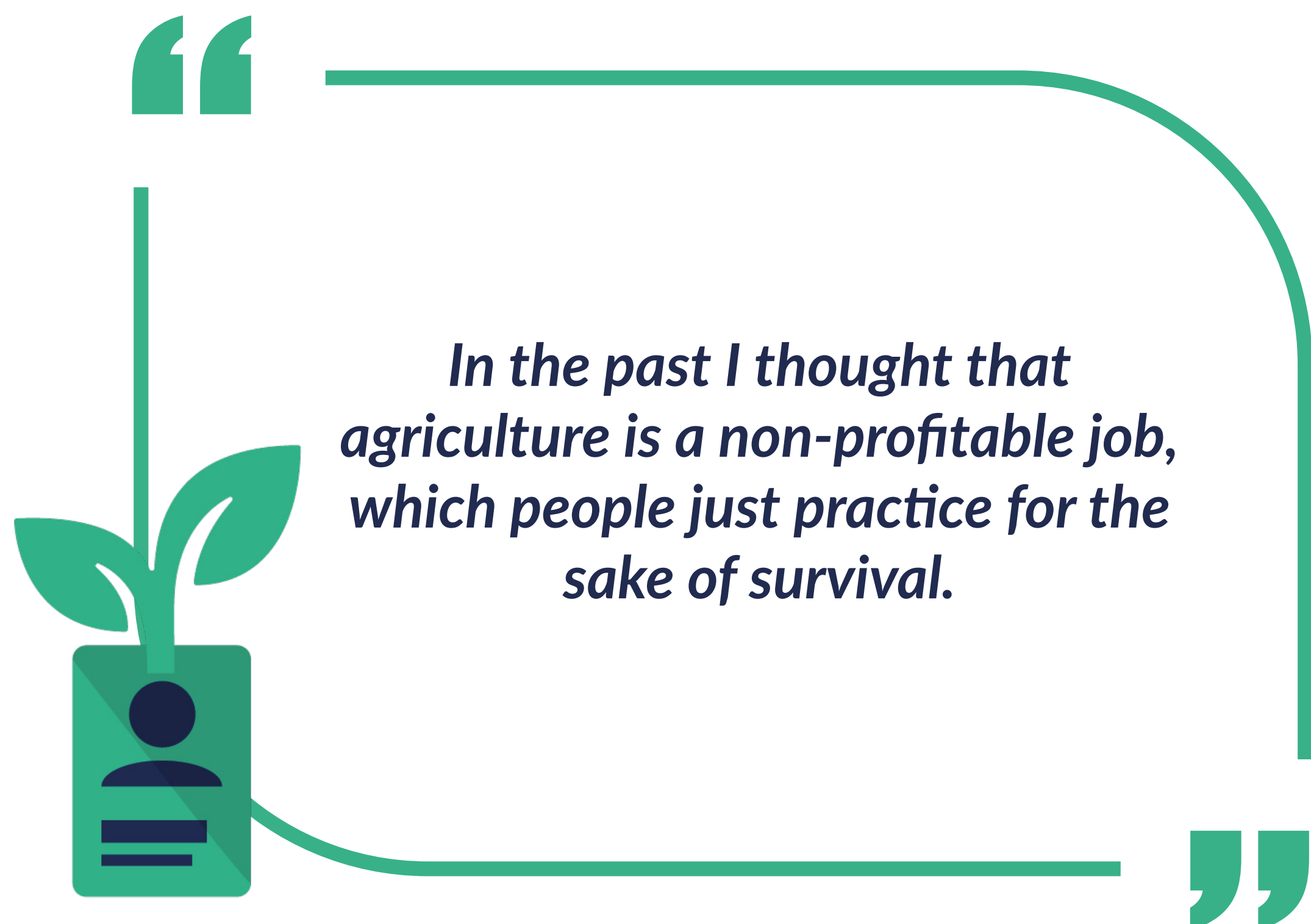
As already addressed above, the perception of the community towards jobs in agriculture can affect the attractiveness of jobs in agriculture. Most of the youth (70%) agree that **negative perceptions** towards jobs in agriculture exist. Community members often see it as a backward business, preferring office jobs over jobs in the field:

"The community has low respect for farmers and agriculture, which discouraged me in the beginning."

The perception that agriculture is a **non-profitable job** often also affects the decision of young people to engage or disengage in agriculture.

Agriculture offers an opportunity to be **self-reliant and fulfill the basic needs**. For most of the respondents (81%) income from agriculture is their only income stream, and most of them are able to meet their basic needs of food (95%), shelter (71%) and clean water (65%) with their income from agriculture.

Once youth are engaged in agriculture or have family members or friends that are working in agriculture, they often see that the sector can be profitable and can offer possibilities to earn an income and sustain their families:



Even though this perception of agriculture being a non-profitable job exists, most young people still start working in agriculture, because of the **need for an income**. Most of the youth in the sample (83%) indicated that they started working on income because they needed an income. This mostly because they **lack other job opportunities**:





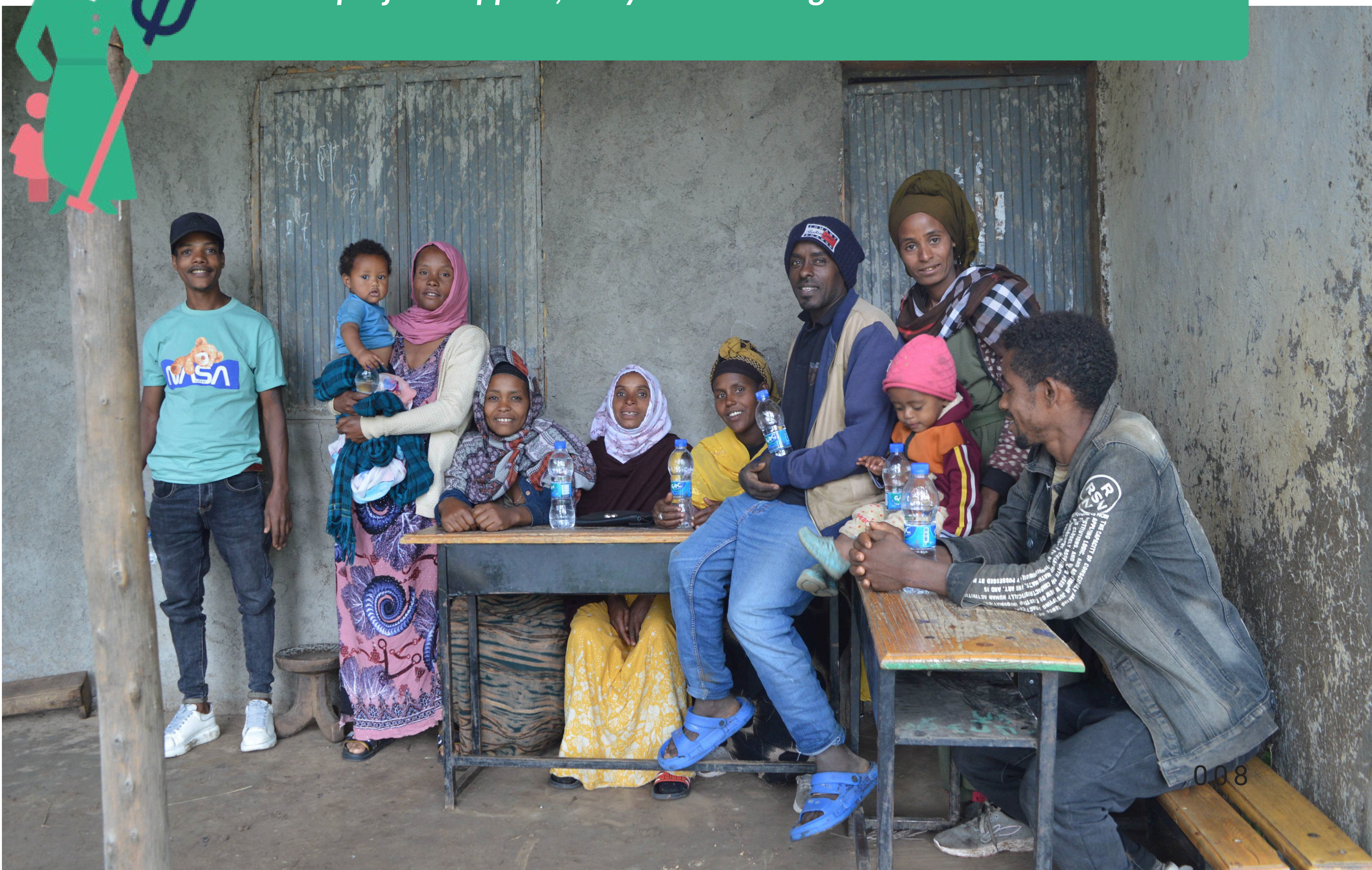
Growing up, I saw a relative who became rich by starting his own farm, he always inspired me.

Once they are engaged in agriculture, they describe their job in agriculture as one that aligns with their personal aspirations (87%) and a job that they are often happy with (84%). Most of the respondents also indicated that agriculture is a job they would like to stay in (92%).

Next to agriculture as a source of income and way to secure basic needs, young people are also motivated to work in agriculture because it is a profession that they inherited from their family and/or because they are passionate about jobs in agriculture. Other motivators for young people to work in agriculture is the growing awareness raising and support for the sector, such as from the government and enterprises. Youth believe that the attention for the sector will further grow and the government will further support the sector. Lastly, the use of technology in agriculture is mentioned as a motivator to engage in agriculture:



In the past agriculture was not attractive, but these days due to awareness creation and the benefits gained from agriculture, motivate youth to engage in agriculture. Moreover, other attracting factors include the introduction of technology in the industry. In case there will be more project support, the youth would get even more attracted.



Modern Agriculture & Technologies

Modern agriculture is often understood among youth as agricultural activity supported with **modern digital and non-digital technologies**, offering several benefits for both the individual as well as the community. According to youth modern agriculture saves time and energy, eases the work, helps to gain better production and therefore income and can help to expand the business.

Although modern agriculture is not yet widely spread, youth see the potential of modern agriculture, as they describe model farmers as those who use modern technologies.



What makes them different from others is that they practice the agricultural activity with greater support of technology.

Most young people (79%) however indicated that they already use some form of technology in their daily agricultural practices and agree (83%) that this technology helps to make their daily jobs easier. Technologies that are already used include non-digital technologies, such as water pumps, dryers, walking tractors and fertilizers and digital technologies, such as social media like YouTube and TikTok.

98% of the youth agree that organizations should do more to promote and enable the use of modern technologies. As they believe these technologies have the potential to increase production, increase profitability, increase product quality, improve the market network and reduce the work burden.

Another advantage of the use of technologies is the expansion of farming activities, which will lead to employment creation for youth:



The primary opportunity is eradicating poverty by ensuring food security. There will be an expansion of the work, which will create large number of employment opportunities for many young people, which will reduce unemployment in the area.

This employment creation will, according to the youth, be further stimulated by the increased recognition of the agricultural sector and a chance to be presented as a modern, successful sector:

"If agriculture is supported by technology, there will be no negative impression from the society."

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